Vol. CIV No. 26 December 23, 1977 75 cents

commonweal

Christmas Issue

GOD BECOMES MAN
NORBERT F. GAUGHAN

MAN BECOMES GOD
JOHN GARVEY

MANY ADVENTS, ONE MARY
ABIGAIL McCARTHY

ANGEL GABRIEL DISSENTS
PETER STEINFELS

A STAR IN THE EAST
FRANK GETLEIN

THE SADAT INITIATIVE
WILSON CAREY McWILLIAMS

SOUTH AFRICAN PRISONER
RON JAVERS

PATRIOTIC GORE
COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

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NEWS & VIEWS

St. Thomas More

The *Times Literary Supplement* of London is not given to lavish praise, but lavish praise is heaped upon the new volumes in Yale's monumental edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More.

Volumes 12, 13 and 14—called the Tower works, for having been written in London Tower while More awaited execution—coincide with international observances marking the quincentenary of More's birth. In *TLS*'s opinion, their publication could not be more appropriate.

"The Yale editors have done much in the past to reveal the full inward purpose of More's life and writings," wrote *TLS* reviewer Nicolas Barker. "They could have built no greater monument for the quincentenary than this noble edition of the Tower works."

Newly issued are *A Dialogue of Comfort, Treatise on the Passion* and *on the Blessed Body*, and the *De Tristitia Christi*, summed up by *TLS* as "the sombre, lonely, but ultimately triumphant meditations."

TLS is especially captivated by *De Tristitia*, in all probability the last of More's writings in the Tower and the volume which it feels "brings us closest to More in his last crucial days."

"Here," it comments, "we can see . . . what led More on; why he died, and why he sought within the framework of the law, which he knew as well as the air he breathed, to fight off death by any choice of his own until it was forced upon him without choice."

At last, as Robert Bolt has More say in *A Man for All Seasons*, it was not a matter of reason; at last it was a matter of love: in *TLS*'s interpretation, love of the church "as a union of Christian people in whom Christ is present." Thomas More went to the block, not rushing forth eagerly, but in the courageous high spirits that had him protecting from the executor's ax the beard that never offended the king.

He left behind that moving passage which the Yale editors single out and which the reviewer says "reveals the unity with Christ which finally was vouchsafed to More, the words with which Christ comforts those afraid to die." *TLS* quotes them unblushingly:

O faint of heart, take courage and do not despair. You are afraid, you are sad, you are stricken with weariness and dread of the torment with which you have been cruelly threatened. Trust me. I conquered the world, and yet suffered immeasurably more from fear, I was sadder, more afflicted with weariness, more horrified at the prospect of such cruel suffering drawing hungrily nearer. Let the brave man have his high-spirited martyrs by the thousand, let him rejoice in imitating them. But you, my timorous and feeble sheep, be content with me alone as your shepherd, follow me as your leader; if you do not trust yourselves, put your trust in me. Look, I am walking ahead of you along the road.

"There," says the reviewer, "are echoes of Isaiah, of Ecclesiasticus, and above all St. John. . . . But the words are all More's. With them we can see, or begin to see, the state to which his long vigil in the Tower brought him."

On June 12, 1535, less than a month before More's execution, "all his bokes and penne and ynke and paper was taken from hym." More thereupon drew the blinds of his windows and kept them shut. When his jailer inquired why, More replied: "Now that the goods and tools are taken away the shop must be closed."

He was beheaded July 6, 1535.

Our Father

Some of the most familiar phrases of the Lord's Prayer disappear in the modernized version recently approved by the General Synod of the Church of England for inclusion in the Alternative Service Book scheduled for 1980.

Gone is "Thy kingdom come"—probably because the kingdom idea is included in in the phrase, "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory."

Gone also, "lead us not into temptation"—substituted for, according to scholars, because the term mistakenly implies that God is the agent of temptation.

The up-dated Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your will be done, on earth as in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen."

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer is not being jettisoned completely. It will remain intact in the regular Service Book.

Our Bishops

The Los Angeles publisher of religious music, who last year brought action against the Archdiocese of Chicago for alleged infringement of copyrights, is now suing the U.S. Catholic bishops for $8.6 million on similar grounds.

Dennis J. Fitzpatrick, composer-owner of FEL (Friends of English Liturgy) Publications, Ltd., has filed an 18-count complaint specifying as copyright violators the Archdioceses of Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, New York and San Francisco, and the Dioceses of Arlington, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Cleveland, Fort Wayne-South Bend, Green Bay, Phoenix and St. Augustine.

His suit charges widespread use of "pirated hymnals" in churches and schools, and attributes to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U.S. Catholic Conference failure to provide adequate direction to the 167 archdioceses and dioceses of the U.S. concerning the proper use of copyrights.

Fitzpatrick termed his action a "last resort." He said complaints to bishops about copyright infringements "were uniformly ignored or rejected," and that he had no recourse but "to resort to the courts to jar the group conscience of some in the Church back to a higher level of awareness of honesty in worship." Fitzpatrick claims to have lost over $8.6 million in revenues during the past three years. He estimated losses in royalties to FEL's 65 author-composers at over $750,000 for the same period.

The suit has been filed in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

Chicago, incidentally, ranks as Fitzpatrick's prime copyright offender. A court-supervised collection of unauthorized hymnals there revealed that 252, or 56 percent, of Chicago's 447 Catholic churches were using pirated hymnals.

Odds and Ends

—If you think you've heard everything, how about "Christian Weight Control"? It's a workshop given in California by Joan Cavanaugh, founder of Pace-Weight Ministries and author of *More of Jesus, Less of Me*. Among Mrs. Cavanaugh's guidelines: "Only buy foods that Jesus, John or Peter would buy." Which takes care, I guess, of TV dinners and Burger Kings. Or as Mrs. Cavanaugh would say, Can you imagine Jesus coming out of the supermarket with 12 bags of chips, one for each apostle?

JOHN DEEDY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Phraseology

Berkeley, Cal.

To the Editors: I read Noonan's "The Devious Employees" [Oct. 28] last week and thought it a sort of fun article: good sense of humor, proper amount of outrage, a couple of good points scored. Then came my own preparation for the Sunday homily, the story of wee Zacchaeus in the sycamore. Behold, an instant Noonan convert! The translation has missed two of Luke's points. In the original Greek, Lk has enclosed it within a neat pun. Although it would appear that Zacchaeus was *seeking* (ezetei of 19:3) Jesus, it really was Jesus, the Son of Man, who had come to *seek* (zetesai) Zacchaeus, to seek and to save the lost (19:10). The NAB has clouded over the point completely with its presentation of Zacchaeus who "was trying to see what Jesus was like," and of the "Son of Man . . . come to search out and save what was lost."

The NAB misses again in the middle of the story with its, "I mean to stay at your house today" (19:5). I take "mean" to indicate Jesus's intention, his desire. But that is not Lk's point, nor his Greek which translates literally, "For today I *must* remain in your house." The word "must" occurs frequently in both Lk's Gospel and Acts. It emphasizes, not Jesus's desire, but the fulfillment of God's plan. Jesus *must* suffer, he *must* announce the good news of the kingdom, he *must* be handed over. So, too, he must enter Zacchaeus's home as a sign that, in the Father's plan, his loving salvation is offered also to sinners.

(REV.) NEAL FLANAGAN, O.S.M.

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Three cheers for John T. Noonan, Jr.! His article "The Devious Employees" [October 18] calls attention, at long last, to the shoddiness of the Confraternity Version of the

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232 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016
Telephone: (212) MU 3-2042

A review of Public Affairs, Literature and the Arts. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Printed in the USA and published bi-weekly by Commonweal Publishing Co. *Copyright © 1977 Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc.* *—US and Canada: $17 a year. Foreign $19. Single copy 75c. Special two-year rate $29.50. Foreign $33.50*

ASSESSMENT AND ANTICIPATION

Once again we slouch towards Bethlehem. Not like Yeats's rough, apocalyptic beast but like tired commuters, our feet aching, our arms full of the plain parcels in which we have wrapped our modest hopes. Maybe the Middle East will lurch into peace. Maybe the managers of the world economy will keep Humpty Dumpty propped up another year. Maybe the keepers of the gulag archipelagoes and the apartheid archipelagoes will blanch before the deeds they inevitably assign themselves. Maybe our native Scrooges will be haunted even a mite before they pronounce their sophisticated "humbugs" on all our sentimental notions of equality and fraternity.

It is a time of assessment and anticipation. Two-faced Janus guards the gate to another year. The Christian tradition looks back to one Coming and awaits another. In the weeks before Christmas two remarkable assessments-anticipations have caught our attention. One was by George Steiner, surveying the whirl and bluster of religious and not-so-religious phenomena that seem to have materialized in answer to the poet Philip Larkin's question, "And what remains when disbelief is gone?" Along with the visitors from outer space and the manipulators of inner space, there is, writes Steiner, a "striking renaissance of *theological* thought and argument. . . . So much of what intuition now compels us to recognize as indispensable, and compels us to revert to even in disagreement, draws its powers from sources implicitly or explicitly theological. . . . It would be foolish to predict a religious revival in any formal and dogmatic sense (though there are significant pointers in just that direction in both the Jewish and Christian worlds). It is too soon to tell. But the hunger is obvious. . . ."

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Brilliant essayist and scholar of language and literature, obsessed by the Holocaust and the destructive powers revealed at the heart of Western civilization, possessed of an almost febrile intelligence, and uneasy in his secularity, Steiner is a representative voice of our "post-modern" sensibility. The second assessment-anticipation comes from a very different quarter—from a group of veteran Catholic activists in Chicago, disturbed by an apparent slackening or clericalizing of Catholic lay initiative. "We are deeply concerned," they write, "that so little energy is devoted to encouraging and arousing lay responsibility for the world. . . . We fear that the almost obsessive preoccupation with the Church's structures and processes has diverted attention from the essential question: reform for what purpose? It would be one of the great ironies of history if the era of Vatican II which opened the windows of the Church to the world were to close with a Church turned in upon herself."

Expressing their thoughts in a document entitled "A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern," these Catholics justifiably evoke a local tradition well known to historians and observers of the Catholic Church in America. "For decades, the Church in Chicago nurtured a compelling vision of lay Christians in society. . . . That same vision produced national movements and networks which generated a dynamic lay leadership. . . . Shall we passively accept that period of history as completely over, and with it the vision that proved to be so creative?"

The signers of the "Chicago Declaration" offer a tempered criticism on several points. First, the valuable involvement of lay people in explicitly churchly ministries and the concentration on issues of internal church reform have devalued the laity's "unique ministry" through secular tasks. Toward both the permanent diaconate and the Detroit "Call to Action," the signers, accordingly, express some ambivalence. Second, in recent years "many priests have acted as if the primary responsibility in the Church for uprooting injustice, ending wars and defending human rights rested with them as ordained ministers." Priests and religious have sought to impose their political agendas upon the laity, at the worst threatening "a revived clericalism—on the left." Third, the ordinary social roles of the laity have been depreciated, as though one could serve justice and peace "only by stepping outside of these ordinary roles as a businessman, as a mayor, . . . or as an active union member"—and change society only as an "outsider." Fourth, the signers evoke "the mainstream of Catholic social thought" and a "sophisticated body of [Christian] social wisdom" as means of mediating between the Gospel and concrete, secular realities without converting the Gospel into political ideology. Fifth, the signers regret the absence of the variety of organizations and networks that once supported the laity in their secular, occupational vocations. The demise of such structures and the failure to devise new ones "may have resulted in the loss of a generation of lay leadership."

These points are all open to further discussion. They rest on theological and political premises that the Declaration does not explicitly state or defend. And despite the signers' awareness of the danger, they may have allowed a certain nostalgia to obscure the unresolved difficulties of the creative vision they invoke. It is an impulse forgivable at this time of year.

In the main, though, we share the sentiment inspiring the Chicago Declaration. Many ties, historical and personal, link *Commonweal* with the experience the Declaration reflects. More important, this journal and its readers have long insisted on the relative autonomy of the secular sphere, and on the need to realize the Christian revelation, in politics, in literature, in culture generally, in ways that do not pretend to deny that autonomy. As one of the oldest "networks" expressing the concerns of the laity, we are determined to continue in this task.

It is worth noting, however, that Steiner is impressed with the accomplishments of *theology*. In his eyes, its recent giants—Bultmann, Barth, Rahner, Küng—have matched or excelled most modern philosophy and literature "in terms of sheer force of insight, of adultness, of the gravity that honors the reader by taking his mental and moral capacities seriously." Perhaps we could align the secular observer with the Chicago signers in a resolution that these be the standards for our intellectual endeavors in every field.

DON THORMAN–R.I.P.

We learn with regret of the death of Donald J. Thorman, publisher of the *National Catholic Reporter*. Mr. Thorman, 52, died Nov. 30 in Kansas City from the lingering effects of a disease contacted several months ago on a professional visit to China.

The death of Mr. Thorman leaves a void in the field of American Catholic journalism, and of Catholic scholarship. His years at *NCR* capped a long and distinguished career. As an editor at *Voice of St. Jude*, now called *U.S. Catholic*, and at *Ave Maria*, and also as a member of the faculty at Loyola University of Chicago, Mr. Thorman helped shape the new times of the American Catholic Church and its members. He wrote several books, one of them under a title which celebrated the new role of the laity in the American Church. It was *The Emerging Layman*, published in 1962.

Mr. Thorman was a valued friend and journalistic colleague. *Commonweal* extends its sympathy to his family and to the staff of *NCR*.

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A STAR IN THE EAST

The givers were all Jews and Moslems, but they gave this city the best Christmas present it's had in years. This was, of course, the abrupt, unscheduled, unexpected and, in some parts, at least, of the State Department, decidedly unwelcome opening of direct, two-party relations between Israel and Egypt, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, his enthusiastic welcome by Israeli officials and people, and the ensuing follow-up events, not least important the no less enthusiastic welcome home by the Egyptian President's own people. Suddenly, everything seemed possible. In that grand old phrase debased by Henry Kissinger between bombing fits, peace was at hand—and for the first time ever in the Thirty Years War of the Middle East.

Peace itself, should it be arrived at, is the gift incomparable, but the Sadat initiative and the Begin response gave Washington another gift as well, freedom from an assumed responsibility that has to be, after all, that of the principals, cannot really be that of friends, fans, backers or observers, however well-intentioned. So unexpected was this auxiliary gift that the recipients here didn't know quite what to make of it, picked nervously at the wrappings, peeked before opening and only at the urgings of grown-ups belatedly got around to saying Thank you.

The problem of the reluctant recipients was not of their own making, but the product of the preponderance of American foreign policy thinking since the Truman administration. This was based on two assumptions, neither exactly axiomatic as things have turned out. The first was the inherent and supreme evil of International Communism, conceived to be a massive monolith bent on the military conquest of the entire planet. The second was the absolute indispensability of the United States, not merely in the fight against Communist conquest, but in world affairs at large. If we didn't do it, nobody else would because nobody else could. Part of the funk at Foggy Botton came from the undeniable perception that although we had not crowed, the sun rose in the east just as if we had.

Perhaps better than if we had, as a matter of fact, a conclusion still being resisted but strongly tempting to those of us who have always suspected the sun would make it every day will-we, nill-we, as Peter Ustinov used to say doing his camp George III.

The Kissinger claque in the press gang has suffered substantial attrition since their man formally became a public entertainer, but the hard-core regulars rallied around to claim the Sadat initiative as the ultimate triumph of the old eavesdropper's shuttle diplomacy, a claim apparently based on the undeniable fact that Sadat's flying time between the two capitals was roughly the same as Kissinger's and the claque's in the old days. No doubt this is one of those questions that can never be answered, but the opposite interpretation surely is at least as tenable, namely that all that shuttle diplomacy was what kept peace from happening. The working of the shuttle bemused the world, including the principals in the Israeli-Arab dispute. As long as the bouncing ball was in the air, nobody else had to do anything and nobody did. With Kissinger departed into show biz, the Egyptian and Israeli governments were undistracted for a change and able to get down to the business of peace.

That interpretation at least has the merit of being entirely consonant with Kissinger's other great diplomatic achievement, the prolongation of the War Against Indochina for another eight years. In contrast, the claqueurs' interpretation has the big bugger going in opposite directions on his two major programs, unless, of course, you accept the Orwellian dictum that war is peace, which, now that I think of it, probably was accepted not only by the claque but by its hero: for Kissinger, we can now understand, the words, Peace is at hand, actually meant here comes another all-time, world record bomb-drop, preferably on Christmas Eve, and he was incapable of seeing any contradiction between what he said and what he meant.

That dictum must be accepted, too, by those Arab leaders who gathered in Tripoli to denounce Sadat's peace initiative as a blow to the cause in the Mideast. You can denounce Sadat's journey to Jerusalem on many grounds if you are an Arab leader: War is more fun, for instance, or whatever happened to driving them into the sea, and so on, but this must be the first time a friendly meeting between the heads of two hostile states has been described as being against the cause of peace.

The Tripoli meeting is irrelevant to what is happening in the Middle East, almost as irrelevant as the dismay of State Department Arabists at losing their traditional role of running upstairs, downstairs, back and forth between two non-meeting parties like so many characters in a Feydeau farce. Egypt has been the big loser in the wars of the so-called "Arab world" against Israel. Egypt lost more land, more soldiers, more equipment and more money than all the rest put together. If there is indeed such a thing at all as an Arab world, Egypt is the natural leader of it. If Egypt decides there will be peace, there will be peace and

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it doesn't much matter what the cheerleader states, such as Libya and Algeria do or say. Jordan has always been a reluctant participant in the wars, sometimes an abstainer, having learned early that in this case at least war does not pay. Syria has been fiercer than Egypt in press releases, but it is really unthinkable that Syria would try the old drive-'em-into-the-sea act by itself.

If Sadat really is aiming at the separate peace he is accused of seeking, the other Arab leaders couldn't have played more neatly into his hands than they have. Their fiercely negative reactions to the threat of peace have produced precisely the isolation of Egypt that is the first requisite for a separate peace. If Sadat ends up with a separate peace with Israel, he will have done so only after his open and dedicated efforts at a joint peace have been stubbornly rejected by the others. Addressing the Knesset, Sadat went unswervingly down the Arab hard-line and repeatedly said he was not interested in a separate peace at all. If he takes one, on the public record, it will be almost by being forced to do so by the others. If that's what Sadat wants, he's smart; if it's what the others don't want, then they're dumb.

The case for some kind of peace, separate, unanimous or in fits and starts, is overwhelming in Egypt's statistics of population, agriculture and national product. Whether it might have been viable or not, Arab socialism never got started because Arab war-making has taken all the time, thought, energy and money that any Egyptian or other Arab leader in the area could scrape together. In one way, the fate of Arab socialism in Egypt recalls the fate of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society: Vietnam was a much more suitable accompaniment to Nixon's benign neglect. In another, the ruin the prolonged war has brought to Egypt is merely the worst case, or one of the worst, of a great deal of the third world. Money and effort cannot be spared for education, agriculture and small industries because it must go into spectacular but inappropriate projects, such as the Aswan Dam, or, more usually, into uniforms, super-modern weapons, war and the preparation for war. The reason it must go into these non-productive, anti-productive, activities is that they are easy to understand and profoundly gratifying to the monarchical leader in ways that improved crop yields can't compete with. Not to be overlooked in all of this, of course, is the role of the Pentagon as an institutional Andrew Undershaft, arms merchant to the world. Like Jefferson, contemporary Americans are well-advised to tremble when they reflect that God is just.

One leader, Sadat, has awakened from the dream of military grandeur. There have just been too many deaths in the desert, too much time lost in the urgent task to make independent Egypt a self-sustaining nation.

The most encouraging thing about the Sadat journey was the journey itself. The second most encouraging was that in pressing the cause of relief for the refugees, he referred to the Palestinians, not to the P.L.O. With an assured peace and with Yasir Arafat's fearless fighters of children dealt out, Israel can afford to return the Sinai and to come to some accommodation on Gaza and the West Bank. Despite Arafat's presence in Tripoli, Syria disowned him by fighting him in Lebanon and now Sadat has followed that example. They created him, after all, and are entitled now to uncreate him.

FRANK GETLEIN

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MIDDLE EAST BREAKTHROUGH

THE SADAT INITIATIVE

President Sadat's visit to Israel was elegant politics, chivalric, passionate and eloquent, quite unlike the bureaucratized drab to which we have become accustomed. It disturbed official routines and upset conventional wisdom, rousing excited expectations and boding dread. The subsequent Arab Recalcitrance, of course, has been sobering. Nevertheless, Sadat's venture brought peace in the Middle East from among the pieties back into the world of living hope. It shook the Israeli government out of its public intransigence, and made some sort of acceptable formula for the Geneva conference seem a real possibility.

By accident or design, the Carter administration has played a shrewd hand in the Middle East, leaving the limelight to local leaders and applauding them when it seemed appropriate. Increasingly, however, America must be prepared to play an active role in encouraging negotiations. Moreover, movement in such negotiations toward a relatively stable peace—and distantly, the administration of such a peace—will require major American commitments. These, of course, are remote prospects, but America, inhibited by post-Vietnam reticence, needs to be prepared before the event.

The United States already played a major role in Sadat's calculations. For all his flair, Sadat is a master in the factional politics of the Middle East, and he went to Israel, as he said, only after "long thought." He expected, and was willing to chance, the hostile Arab reaction. As many observers note, Egypt's economy is desperately needy, and her military, deprived of Soviet

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spare parts and technicians, soon must be reequipped. Given the Carter administration's desire for a Geneva conference and its hesitant sympathy for the Palestinians, Sadat knew that his gesture would strengthen his claims on Washington whatever Israel's response. He counted on enough American aid and investment to justify the risk of his *démarche*.

Sadat's desire for peace is also genuine, though his proposals were the familiar demands for the return of the occupied lands and some sort of Palestinian state in return for guarantees of Israel's existence and integrity. The request that Israel exchange territory for promises, at best a disparity, is made evidently less persuasive by years of Arab implacability. Imaginatively, Sadat sought to reduce fear and mistrust by offering himself as a "willing sacrifice," and his trip demonstrated a greatness of spirit which almost forced Israel to respond positively. Sadat is the first Arab leader to capture American imaginations and to threaten Israel's standing with the American public.

Sadat did not exaggerate when he emphasized the danger in which he has placed himself; it was not simply hubris that led him to liken himself to Isaac. But Americans need to remember that the risks to Israel and to Sadat are not comparable. Israel's existence as a collectivity has been challenged by her Arab enemies, and whatever the threat to Sadat personally, Egypt's survival is not endangered. Sadat's courage certainly disposes Israelis to trust *him,* which is pure gain since that confidence did not exist previously. But the fact that it took great bravery for Sadat to engage in ordinary diplomatic courtesies only emphasizes the risk to Israel in trusting Egypt or other Arab policies. Sadat is praised, rightly, because peace is not the easy way for Arab leaders. Whatever new trust there is depends on Sadat's personal virtues, a fragile foundation given human mortality and the relative instability of Egyptian (and all Arab) politics. Statesmen are needed for new beginnings, but their wisdom is expressed in teachings and institutions which shape the collective life of peoples. Sadat's daring has provided only the opportunity for statecraft, not the thing itself.

Can Israel, for example, safely abandon the occupied lands? Sadat argued that the bond to one's land is sacred and cannot be compromised or bartered away. Insisting that Israel withdraw from the territories occupied since 1967, Sadat was willing to concede Israel's 1948 boundaries and to provide non-territorial guarantees for Israel's security. Even if Begin's government is disposed to abandon its claim to the territories won in 1967, it will remember that to Arab "rejectionists," the 1967 lands are no more hallowed than the areas Israel occupied in 1948. Sadat's view of the inviolable sanctity of the bond to one's land is curiously pragmatic. He would, in effect, forget everything before 1948, "rewriting . . . history," as he suggested, to make a new beginning. Many autocrats have discovered that it is not so easy to wipe the slate clean, and the effort to do so is likely to be especially difficult in the Middle East where monuments crowd the landscape and memory rules so much of the mind. The past, as Begin reminded Sadat, is the *raison d'être* of Israel; a state which reckons history in millennia will not readily credit pledges to "let bygones be bygones" even if the Arabs—and especially the Palestinians—are persuaded to make them.

Moreover, Palestinian terrorism and guerrilla conflict will not completely disappear under any conceivable circumstances. Winnowed to those who regard the Cause as holy and who are habituated to lawlessness, the Palestinian militants will not be inclined to accept half measures. A great many Palestinians, possibly a considerable majority, are eager for peace. But a government of "moderates" based on such support would not be enough to restrain terrorism. No one argues that the Palestinian people regard a neutralized, West Bank state as desirable in itself; at best, such a state would be a compromise made necessary by the fact of Israeli power. To a Palestinian persuaded of the need to compromise, those who continue the struggle may seem unrealistic and imprudent, but they will not seem criminal. Peaceful, law-abiding citizens may oppose terrorists and still regard them as patriots or, at least, be unwilling to betray them to "outsiders." Negotiating with the P.L.O. itself would not eliminate terrorism, even if the P.L.O. accepted a West Bank state. The example of Ireland is apposite: successive factions of the I.R.A. have adjusted to the established order of things, only to leave unreconciled fragments to take up the struggle. The most that can be urged on Israel is that coming to terms with the Palestinians of whatever persuasion will reduce the level of violence, ideally to a point where it is within the competence of ordinary police acting under the rule of law. Even that limited ideal, however, presumes that Arab governments could resist the moral pressure and the political temptation to support revanchist Palestinian terrorism. The Arab governments, in other words, will always have reasons to undermine a peace with Israel. They could be trusted to uphold such a peace only if even more compelling advantages attached them to it, and such interests remain to be created.

With even negotiations barely in the realm of possibility, such considerations may seem less than pressing. Certainly, much needs to be done now to bring about a Geneva conference. Apparently, Washington realizes that success for Sadat will be the best argument in favor of his policy. Sadat should not have to beg for aid and investment, and any request for military equipment should receive serious consideration even from Washington's doves. Israel has already given Sadat a good deal of support, but Israel might also consider a dramatic gesture of her own: she could announce that Israel trusts Sadat enough to let *him* select the Palestinian represen-

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tatives at Geneva. Even if Sadat selected the P.L.O. (which now seems unlikely), Begin could agree to sit down with them as a courtesy to Sadat, not because he accepted their claim to speak for the Palestinian people.

Getting the Israelis and the Arabs to Geneva, however, is hardly enough. The problems of the Middle East have been decades—if not centuries—in the making. Americans, so often blind to the burden of the past, are prone to the delusion that the future will take care of itself. Negotiations at Geneva will be futile without a long-term strategy for peace capable of addressing the real conflicts and dilemmas of Middle Eastern politics.

People and nations can be given reasons to put old animosities aside. New economic patterns and interests, new horizons and new fears make old animosities fade and new loyalties seem attractive: politics, as they say, makes strange bedfellows. Economic and social change may, in the long term, be Israel's best hope for security, especially if it makes Arab governments less dependent on anti-Zionism as a justification for sacrifice and an excuse for failure. Such a transformation would be delicate and costly, and America must expect to be asked to pay a good part of the bill. It would, moreover, take a long time to bring about, and Israel would need better guarantees than pledges from Arab governments for her immediate security.

In fact, even successful economic modernization is no panacea. Bloody memories die hard. Ireland, nemesis of the pragmatists, reminds us how much human beings will sacrifice to keep the warm familiarity of ancient hatred amid the cold uncertainties of change. If Israel is to give up the military security afforded by the occupied territories, she will probably need a very firm and relatively permanent military guarantee from the United States. Since American promises are at discount these days, we must expect Israel to ask for commitments which are both public and explicit. But as Sadat's example teaches, peace, like war, demands dangers and discomforts, and if we are serious about peace in the Middle East, we will be willing to pay the price.

WILSON CAREY MCWILLIAMS

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PERCY QOBOZA

IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON

It was at an off-the-record briefing in March 1976 that then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in reply to a question, first signaled a dramatic tilt in U.S. policy toward South Africa. The man who so eloquently phrased the question that morning in a suite in Boston's Ritz-Carlton Hotel now sits rotting in a South African jail cell.

In 1975-76 Percy Qoboza, editor of *The World,* South Africa's largest and most influential black newspaper, was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard. Kissinger had agreed to meet with the Niemans—18 journalists from the U.S. and abroad who were spending the year studying at Harvard—and the question-and-answer session had been rather routine until Qoboza rose to speak. The portly black journalist asked the American Secretary of State if the U.S. would recognize the Transkei when it became nominally independent of white-ruled South Africa in October 1976. Most black Africans considered the government-rigged autonomy of this black region a severe blow to the aspirations for real majority rule for South Africa's 18 million blacks. Kissinger, the student of European politics and the caretaker of U.S.-Soviet détente, appeared not at all at home discussing the volatile South African situation.

"Although I am not yet fully informed on all aspects of the issue," Kissinger replied to his questioner. "I cannot imagine any circumstances under which we would recognize or support subsequent United Nations membership for the Transkei."

Afterward, Qoboza was elated. "Well, we finally got something out of him," the black editor jubilantly told Nieman curator James C. Thompson, as Kissinger and a phalanx of aides swept out of the room.

Last October 19, Percy Qoboza, always a voice of hope and reason in stormy South Africa, was hustled out of his office in Johannesburg and clapped into Modderbee prison. *The World,* voice for an estimated million blacks, was closed. The editor and more than 60 other blacks were caught in the government's net of oppression that day. Also quashed was a still undetermined number of white South Africans sympathetic to the goal of black majority rule. These whites—newspaper people, intellectuals, ordinary citizens—were "banned," a curious South African custom which effectively silences the voice of dissent by forbidding people to write or speak for publication and which sharply circumscribes where they may travel.

One month after the October jailings, South African police swept down on a black township near Pretoria and, in a house-to-house search with military helicopters hovering overhead, arrested 626 more blacks, including 198 schoolchildren. Authorities justified the massive raid

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as an attempt "to combat criminal elements." All of those blacks, including the children, were held on flimsy charges or no charges at all.

In the wake of those repressive actions in South Africa has come a worldwide flood of outrage. Both the U.S. and the UN reacted sharply, imposing an arms embargo and threatening an oil boycott. The National Council of Churches, the American Newspaper Publishers Association, Sigma Delta Chi (the professional journalists' association) and a host of other groups, both public and private, have condemned the desperate acts of the desperate men who run South Africa's white minority government.

But Prime Minister John Vorster has answered the outrage with scorn, stating flatly before cheering crowds of his white supporters, that South Africa would not be "ruled" from abroad. The nearly unanimous tide of world opinion has washed over the perverse white-minority regime, only to leave the perpetrators of such massive inhumanity high and dry, still safe in a dream world of their own where 4.3 million whites control the wealth, politics and power while 18 million blacks labor in poverty, restricted in where they may live, work, or be educated. In a speech before a National Council of Churches convocation, Andrew Young, U.S. chief delegate to the UN, and an ordained minister, prayed: "Lord have mercy for the hell which falls on John Vorster, not after death, but in the day-to-day sinful life that he has adopted as national policy in that government."

Though that hell will ineluctably fall one day when the black majority finally loses its incredible patience in the face of repression, for the present, Percy Qoboza and all the nameless others remain jailed. Qoboza's jailing, without charges or trial, will last at least until next August. After that, it could be extended. Even upon his eventual release there is little hope that he will ever practice journalism again in white-ruled South Africa.

Yet the faith of the devoutly Roman Catholic editor and his hope for peaceful change continue. His wife, Anne, is permitted to visit his cell for only a half hour each Monday and Friday. His five children have not seen their father since his jailing. He asks his wife to bring food when she visits—not for himself but for the more than 50 other unknown blacks jailed with him.

For her part, Anne, a quiet woman of tremendous dignity, has become radicalized. She has organized the wives of imprisoned blacks to pressure the government and to monitor the situations of the jailed men. The Vorster government's record on keeping detained blacks healthy is appalling: twenty-one such prisoners have died during the last 20 months, including "black consciousness" leader Steve Biko, whose death last September now looks more and more like homicide, the judicial decision notwithstanding.

There is a real question, too, whether Qoboza would accept his own freedom if the South African authorities should eventually bow to public opinion and grant it. Without the simultaneous release of the others jailed with him, Qoboza could well elect to remain behind bars.

Percy Qoboza's nine months' stay in America changed him. Living, for the first time in his 39 years, in a society where blacks and whites were equal under the law was a revelation. At first he would pause outside restaurants in Harvard Square, looking in the windows to see if blacks were admitted before he went in. He asked an American black journalist to accompany him one day on a shopping trip. He felt uncomfortable, he explained, at being allowed to try on the suits. But he quickly began to enjoy the open social system. Shortly before he left Cambridge for home he quipped to a friend: "I think I'm beginning to live like a white man."

Once back on Johannesburg, though, all the joviality died. Percy was immediately caught up in covering the the rioting that broke out in Soweto, his home township. His newspaper, *The World,* became a crusading voice in the turbulence. White foreign correspondents, barred from the black riot areas, depended on Qoboza's staff of black reporters for news of the quickly changing events. The black editor found himself being quoted in newspapers around the world as he furnished day-by-day assessments of the situation in South Africa. In his regular column, "Percy's Pitch," he daily did battle with the forces of *apartheid,* at one point vowing in print to "nail" any government official responsible if foul play were discovered in the death of Steve Biko.

Well, the government nailed Percy Qoboza first. But the black editor was a prophet, too. He had predicted it.

In letters to American friends, Qoboza wrote eloquently of the situation in South Africa and of his growing fear. He wrote about his American experience in a letter last year, ". . . for the first time in my life I could distinguish between right and wrong . . . (before that) I had accepted injustice and discrimination as part and parcel of our traditional way of life. After my year (at Harvard) the things I'd accepted before made me angry. It is because of this that the character of my newspaper has changed tremendously. We are an angry newspaper. For this reason we have made some formidable enemies and my own personal life is not worth a cent.

"Many of my friends are now in jail, held without trial," he wrote. He realized that his own prominence had "made it difficult for people to arrest me. But that will come one of these days. . . ." Today, for all his prominence, courage and optimistic humanity, Percy Qoboza finds himself in the same desperate predicament as his 18 million mostly unknown black brethren: in hell in South Africa.

RON JAVERS

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MANY ADVENTS, ONE MARY

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

As the residents of Cape Cod broke out the Christmas street decorations and the Advent wreaths and started the recordings of Christmas carols sounding through the shopping malls, this year the newspaper, *The Cape Codder* reminded its readers that three hundred years ago it was not only imprudent to celebrate Christmas on Cape Cod but it was illegal as well.

The settlers of Cape Cod came from "New Plimouth" across the bay where on Christmas Day in 1620, according to Willison's book, *Saints and Strangers*, work began in earnest on December 25th. It made no difference to the Pilgrims that it was Christmas for they scorned the celebration as a "human invention" and a Roman "corruption."

"John Robinson, one of the early Pilgrim leaders, had criticized the Dutch. They were not 'true' Christians, he informed them, and would never be until they ceased celebrating Christmas—and Easter, too, for that matter. There was no warrant for either in scripture."

Reading this in this Advent season —which was in my youth thought of also as the time of Mary—brings to my mind an article by my friend Robert McAfee Brown in the October *Christianity and Crisis*, entitled "Two Marys—Two Gospels." Dr. Brown was writing of an incident which took place at a liturgy celebrated in a *barrio* somewhere in Central America. Everything, he assured the readers, was true "but the facts" which had been altered to conceal the identity of the original narrator.

The priest celebrating the experimental liturgy with the desperate poor there had initiated, evidently long since, dialogue homilies. On September 12th he had asked of his hearers what the date meant to them. They were reminded variously, first of the death of Allende, "which was followed by renewed oppression," then of the death of Mao, and finally that of Martin Luther King. Did the day remind them only of death, asked the celebrant. Someone then remembered that it was also the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

Was there any connection between Mary and the fighters against oppression? The hearers were unsure, and the verse from the Magnificat was read to them,

> He has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the lowly! he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away.

What had the girl who said that in common with the image of the virgin in the cathedral? That virgin was enthroned; she wore a crown and rings on her fingers; she wore a silk robe. Had she not been appropriated by the rich and the mighty and the men of the church who were unmindful of the plight of the poor?

There began an antiphony between the hearers. The girl of the Magnificat would not be enthroned. She would be down in the dirt and the dust like the people of the *barrio*. "Take off her crown!" She would not wear a silk robe but like them old and torn clothes. "Take off her robe!" And so on.

The incident ends inconclusively. It was not clear whether the dethroned Mary was to remain in the minds of the people of the *barrio* an advocate, the refuge of sinners, and the help of the poor. Or was she simply to disappear among them?

We all need to be reminded of the Mary of the gospels—a poor girl who hastened into the hill country to help her cousin Elizabeth, who bore her child in a cave, who helped the neighbors at wedding feasts, who followed her son at a distance, who stood beneath the cross and waited for him once again with the apostles in the upper room. Without her assent, the gospel says, there would have been no coming of the Savior.

The Mary of the gospels pondered things in her heart and meditated on the scripture. It was as the fruit of meditation that the gospel ascribes to her the liberating stanzas of the Magnificat:

> My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid.
>
> Behold, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
>
> Because he who is mighty, hath done great things to me.

Many of us have rejoiced to discover her revolutionary words proclaiming the destruction of the proud and the mighty. But still I wonder if the liberation priest of the *barrio*—somehow I envision him as young and from the North—didn't miss the point. There are not two Marys. There are two truths. There is the literal truth of the poor woman of Nazareth and there is the mythic truth of the Mary, who has been called "blessed among women," from generation to generation just as she foretold. The message of Mary enthroned is the message of the victory of the poor.

Revolutionaries are always Puritans, it seems. Perhaps they look on symbols and celebrations as enervating. But isn't it a serious thing to take away the age-old source of comfort and hope? Isn't it really what is now called the crime of deculturization? Why should the people be without the solace of the ancient litany: "Health of the sick, pray for us; refuge of sinners, pray for us; com-

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GOD BECOMES MAN

NORBERT F. GAUGHAN

A Christmas meditation

In his excellent and devotional *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on The Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, the distinguished biblical scholar Father Raymond Brown says, "The first two chapters of Matthew and Luke are just as profoundly Christian and as dramatically persuasive as the last two chapters, the story of the Passion and Resurrection." But this tale transcends the Christian dimension. As Caryll Houselander has said, the story of the birth of Christ has become part of "the collective consciousness of mankind, invested with light and loveliness." In a rudimentary survey conducted in one secular college class on "What feast or holiday do you like best?," the students, from varied religious, cultural, racial backgrounds, unanimously chose Christmas. This may have been because of emotional connections with the family's keeping of the feast, with only good remembrances filtered through the screen of memory. Still, it is true that the telling of the birth of Christ has become part of mankind's collective consciousness—probably because the story appeals to continual and secret longings of the human heart. What follows is a meditation on some of these longings.

I. Christmas is a story of a promise made and a promise kept. The center of the Gospel account is a promise made to a young girl. "You shall conceive and bear a son . . . He will be great . . . The holy child to be born will be called 'Son of God'." When we hear this now, in an age of promises made mostly to be broken, deliberately or without design, we still want to believe in promises made and kept. This is not just the case of the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Nor is it the fulfillment of the promise made by God, the "First Gospel," or "Proto-Evangelium" of Genesis 3:15. No, Christmas is not just the promise made on God's part, it is also the promise given by a maiden which makes it possible for God's Word to be fulfilled. In this lies the great appeal of the Christmas story, as hymns and songs attest, when they ponder the truth that God waited upon the maiden's "yes." A girl (young and awkward according to the world's judgments) makes a promise: "Here am I. I am the Lord's servant; as you have spoken, so be it." Mary will keep that promise, all the way to the cross and beyond. But truth is, the keeping began before the promise was made. This woman was not young in God's ways. She was not awkward in her knowledge of God's word. Daughter of Israel, she has had before her eyes the certainty that the God of Israel was faithful. Mary had begun the keeping of the word long before the angel asked for her "yes." Why else was she able to say, "I am the Lord's servant?" Because, child of Joachim and Anna, she had been raised on God's word and had inwardly said, "So be it" to him so many times.

At Christmas we are met with this mystery of promises kept. Even more, we are confronted with the paradox that God's promise can, by his will, only be fulfilled when men keep theirs. Experience has taught us too well of fickle man; we have learned to our dismay not only "la donna è mobile." From our own failures to keep our word, we know how weak, how impossible it is for each to be firm, constant, and keep the bond. So if we cannot keep our promises, how then can we expect others to keep theirs? (We still do.) Are our promises but weak desires, pious hopes, temporizing evasions based on our assumption that surely reasonable persons (as we all are) cannot expect others to live up to their words?

This is the mood, indeed the faith of our day. Nations, peoples, presidents, leaders, statesmen, why then, even ordinary men and women: none of these should be held to the keeping of a promise. But Christmas focuses our gaze upon the maiden: calm, serene, faithful. Mary is a mere slip of a girl who makes her word come true, and by this makes the Word, the Son of God, our ever-living Word, dwell in our midst.

Here is the secret of God's promise at Christmas. Before it can come to be, we must try to keep our prom-

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ises. As Gabriel Marcel reminds us, God is our fidelity. He, the Faithful One, makes us become faithful. We are not to make our oaths, vows, or promises rashly, easily, in a careless manner. All the promises we make to God begin to be when we keep our promises made to men. There is deep mystery here. God's Word must grow in the maiden before he can come to all men. By keeping her promise, the Virgin nourishes the Word, who only then appears to men. Jesus is God's promise (pro-missus)—the "missus pro nobis"—the One Sent For Us. He can only dwell in our midst when with all our hearts, we strive to keep the promises made, in his name, to others.

II. Christmas is the story of journeys made. These lead to the heart's desire found in the quest, which begins another, different journey. Consult the Gospel stories. So many humans must make a journey. Joseph and Mary have to leave their homes to satisfy the demands of the imperial census. They travel to and from Egypt to save the child. On another journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem, they lose him. They will find him only when they retrace their steps. Sometimes we must go back to discover where our own quest went awry.

The shepherds give up their customary haunts. "Come, we must go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened." Straight away, there must be no delay, no putting off. The wise men who "traveled under a solitary star," to quote Houselander's lovely phrase, journey to the wrong place, Herod's palace. At that turning point of their lives, they must consult others, to learn how to make it right again. Herod helps them, gives them the right answer, but for the wrong reason, "So that I myself may go and pay him homage." Wrong or frustrated quests may teach us how to straighten out the paths of our lives. But we must permit ourselves to be taught, to learn from others how to re-orient ourselves. (The Magi, even if they did come from the Orient, needed orientation from on high.)

Those who will not make the journey, for whatever reason, may not find their heart's desire. Or worse, mistake it. Herod is not at all prepared to leave his palace. All are expected to come to him. He will not change his life, nor direction. Already he is doomed. He wants others to make the journey for him. For this, he will not get what he wants, knowledge of the location of the child. In his wrath, the tyrant strikes out and brings death to others: the mothers and children of Bethlehem. (It's true: when we are not willing to make our personal search for God, we sometimes end up hurting others, punishing them for our failures.)

Herod's scribes and prophets are much the same. They know where to go; they have the knowledge, but do not know what to do with it. They cannot begin because all their researches have not prepared them really to receive God's invitation. These "men of God" have read the Scriptures well: "He will be born in Judaea." But they will not attempt the personal quest. They are willing to sell their knowledge of God to the power of the State, for favor, for advancement. If they cooperate with the king, surely he will reward them and be their security. Men of Scripture, they had forgotten the Psalmist, "The Lord is my Rock, my Buckler, my Shield." They will not budge except to do the king's bidding. So keepers of God's word will miss the Word made flesh. Along with their king, their lives are barren and empty. One despot more vicious than the other will enslave them; or rather, they will allow him to enslave them because of their complacency and apathy.

Occasionally, to reach the soul's delight, you do not have to journey far. Anna, the prophetess and Simeon, have long been waiting for the sign that will mark their travel's end. They see the sign carried into the temple in his mother's arms, and they have to go but a little further on.

Yet all this is possible because the journey was first initiated by God. It begins in the mystery of the God-

head, when in the fullness of time, as St. Paul says, "When the term was completed, God sent his own Son." It is God's initiative that bridges the infinite distance between us. God comes to us, so that we can begin our search for him. God's Son did not come slowly, hesitantly. As the book of Wisdom says (and the Fathers of the church applied this to Christ's coming to us), "All things were lying in peace and silence and night in her swift course was half spent, when Thy almighty Word leapt from Thy royal throne in heaven. . . ."

Vatican II was right to call believers, the church, "a pilgrim people." Unfortunately the title has been thrown about so carelessly that it almost is meaningless. We *are* pilgrims; as a people, we journey together. But a people is constituted of persons. Each of us makes the same journey: "Come, *we* must go straight to Bethlehem." Together we ask, "Where is the child who is born to be king of the Jews?" But each asks the question for himself. The search is unique, and personal, the quest for God, my heart's desire. Mary, Joseph, shepherds, Magi, Simeon, Anna all will make different

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journeys. The quest is ever unique, the response always personal. The search is crucial (there is a "crux," a cross, many crossroads in it). Those who intend or will to stay in one place, to let God find them, run the risk of missing him, or not discovering him. Worst of all, they may mistake something else for God. Then they may end up as desolate as Herod was in his prison-palace, when the Magi did not return.

It is important to note that once we have found him, we cannot remain static. For the Magi, it was a case of "Being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned home another way." The shepherds ". . . returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen; it had all happened as they had been told." Joseph and Mary must leave Bethlehem; there are Egypt, Nazareth, Jerusalem ahead. We continue the journey once we have found him. But because we are changed by the meeting, it is a different road. We make the 160-degree turn implied by the New Testament word "metanoia," that conversion which literally means being turned around in an opposite direction. But together we glorify and praise God. "It has happened as we have been told." Now we must give collective witness of that for others.

III. Christmas is harmony, the reconciliation of opposites. Christ is God's harmony with, and harmonizing of, man. The Greeks gave us the word "harmony," to signify the joining. From it, in time, came "concord," and lastly, the "happy combination of many diverse things into one." So much of our human experience seems to be caught up in contraries, and even contradictories. The pre-Socratic philosophers told us of this. They noted the conflict between the temporal and eternal, the changeless and changing, the permanent and the passing, the transcendent and immanent. To describe this they spoke of tension, or the conflict of opposites, resulting, as Heraclitus said, in a "logos," an element of arrangement common to all things. Conflict destroyed the old to create anew. Another philosopher spoke of love and strife, the combining of things and their breaking apart. Harmony came from the balancing of the scales, "equilibrium." The word was one fabric woven of the limited and unlimited. Simone Weil, in her *First Notebook*, is absorbed with this equilibrium; she speaks of mean and proportion, high and low, separation and unity, awed above all "that a Divine Person should be a thing." But she concludes that only thus could there be the unheard of friendship between God and man in Christ.

When the Fathers of the church contemplated the mystery of the Incarnation and Nativity, they saw it as a harmony between heaven and earth. It had been announced by the angelic choir: Glory in heaven, peace on earth for men. The Gospels are stories of contraries reconciled, and opposites made one by the stupendous act of God, who crossed the infinite boundaries between him and man. But what a way to do it: the strong God becomes the weakest of the weak. St. Paul says, being God meant nothing to him, he assumed the nature of a slave. The Fathers rhapsodized about the topsy-turviness of God's dealings with men. "My ways are not your ways," indeed. That divine turning of the tables, hinted at in Greek fables, became part of all our subsequent fairy tales. In *Tales from Eternity,* Rosemary Haughton develops such themes: the youngest son (who wins out over the elders); the wise animals (who recognize the mystery, more than that allegedly rational animal, man); the real princess (never found among the proud and haughty); the quest, the searching which alone leads to the "happy-ever-after"!

The Christmas stories suggest best this harmony, reconciliation, peace. Matthew who gives Christ's genealogy, tells us the Spotless Lamb of Israel descended from, among others, Rahab, the harlot and Ruth, not a Jew. The first Joseph dreamed dreams that brought him and his people into Egypt and eventual bondage. The second Joseph, betrothed to Mary, is sent dreams which will bring the New Israel back, in a flight into Egypt (not away from it). By this, the brothers and sisters of a new Moses will be freed forever from the bondage of sin. A Virgin will give birth to a child; it is the only way Emmanuel, God-with-us, can come to be. Tiny, insignificant Bethlehem is raised higher than mighty Jerusalem. Shepherds of Bethlehem will discover by another kind of shepherd, who will be the Shepherd foretold by Ezekiel.

Kings offer homage to a mere child. The birth of one child brings about the death of other children. A barren woman, Elizabeth, gives birth to an infant. Her husband, Zacharias, whose task it is to proclaim God's praises as a priest, will give greater witness to God by his silence. An elder cousin, Elizabeth, must and willingly does give deference to a young maid. An unborn child, later to be the Baptist, already proclaims the presence of the Messiah by leaping in his mother's womb, foreshowing what he will do later: "Look, there he is, the Lamb of God." God's topsy-turviness is enunciated in Mary's Magnificat, which proclaims that the poor are now rich, and the proud impoverished. Old monarchs come tumbling down as the humble are made kings. A decree of the state, up to now not known for bringing about God's ways, establishes a census which allows the prophecy of Bethlehem's greatness over all Judaea to be fulfilled. A full hostelry is suddenly revealed to be really empty of God and his love; an empty stable is seen filled with the presence of God. Miserable shepherds, the last usually, if at all, to receive the favors and blessings of men, are the first to hear the good news of God's greatest gift and to avail themselves of that blessing incarnate. An old man and an old woman are young in spirit when they find a child they never knew, but knew about. A lad of twelve with his wisdom

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confounds the learning of those trained in the ways of God.

These harmonies convince the Fathers of the church that what men see is not really so; that what is seen by men through the eyes of God is the true reality. Gospel readers continue to reckon these contradictions. God, the provider of all, is provided for by a simple maiden. The Sibylline Oracle will exclaim, "The Holy Virgin, distinguished by her beauty and honor, will feed the king of heaven, in his younger years, with her milk." The king of creation is watched over by creature animals, who are wiser than Herod. Plots and counterplots of kings are foiled by the simplicity of a young girl, attuned to the ways of God. Wise men must be instructed in dreams, and are led by nature's star. The dark of night is pierced by angelic light. And on it goes.

It is this facet of Christmas: God turning the tables on men, as it were, that has inspired the countless stories associated with Christmas. There are other infancy narratives, in the apocryphal gospels. These are not to be despised, for, as Father Raymond Brown has it, they seek only to throw a reverse mirror on Christ: what we saw of him in the public life, he already was in his childhood. So there are tales of wonder attendant as the Holy Family makes its way to and from Egypt: trees that give shelter; flowers and roses that bloom in the snow; chance meetings with other children who will turn out to be an Apostle, or even Judas Iscariot. Such stories are still cherished for they flow from this unbelievable fact of God's reconciliation with us, making our reconciliation with self possible.

This has inspired, above all, our Christmas music. Again, the Sibylline Oracle, "The king will recline his limbs in the lap of the queen of the world." Joseph Haydn will set to music, "A maid, a servant. Mary confesses herself to be, but God calls her a mother, and a queen." Marc-Antoine Charpentier will compose a canticle that sings, "The Eternal One is born, the Endless One is caught and concealed in our appearance." It never ceases and of late we have Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors,* and Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols," which sets to music these words: "This stable is a Prince's Court, This crib His chair of State."

Christmas music, all harmonious, celebrates Christ, our Harmony. A feast of reconciliation, Christmas announced that in a world of stress and a life of tension, there is for each one of us the possibility of peace. We know well our vagrant moods, our ups and downs. It is heartening to know in the storms of our lives and the tempest of our times, we can find equilibrium in him. Truly the Christ child is mediator in another sense. He, the middle ground as it were, becomes the center, to raise up our lowliness. If we cannot attain the highest heights of God, we can strive for the height of God when He stoops down and reaches out to us. For at least we can move toward a Child, in our loves and our deeds. If men did not want the peace he brought, he still offered us his peace, reminding us, however, it is not that peace which the world gives.

Ah, the world. It is too much with us. For it, Christ is a sign of contradiction, not of harmony. He remains yet the child destined for the rise and fall of many. But men can still learn from him. Come to the stable, Dr. Freud, and discover that by his help we can overcome the things that went wrong or were lacking in our infant years. We *are not* trapped in our past. Where are you, Dr. B.F. Skinner? Know that all your Waldens are but pale shadows of a Bethlehem, where the discovery of the child and love of him alone can change the directions and hearts of men. Men, women, young and old, of all colors and races, learn what the early church knew. In its legends, it saw in the Magi symbols of the differences that exist between men, which were reconciled into one as they sought out God's Son. We chuckle sentimentally to discover that one of them is depicted as black; but we so conveniently forget that when the times come to live out the implication. Philosophers, kings, diplomats, remember what Chesterton spoke to you. You must bow your head, stoop a little, before you can enter that low-ceilinged stable-cave. But do that, and oh, you will grow, stand more erect; you will be able to reach out beyond the stars.

EDMUND PENNANT

TALKING TO WALLS

Talking to walls
when you are gone
I will be selective.

They will have to be
west walls refining
the raisin gold of morning
every morning.

They will have to be walls
that listen sweetly
and can keep a secret.

They will not presume
to be weight-bearing walls
holding up a roof of lead
against unlikely heavens.

When I join you
we will be willows
whose roots move walls.

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MAN BECOMES GOD

JOHN GARVEY

A hard saying at Christmastime

During every Christmas season someone feels obliged to point out from the pulpit that Christmas is not the greatest Christian feast. Easter and Pentecost were both considered more important in the ancient church, because they celebrated the Resurrection—which was, after all, the point of Jesus's life—and the birth of the church which is charged with spreading the gospel. A variation on this scrooge-ish line is the reminder that Christmas didn't happen exactly as we think it did, that the infancy narratives are instructive fables, and so forth. Not that I would quarrel with the truth of what gets said in such homilies; but there does seem to be a joylessness in people for whom such sterile considerations are important. They are like the English professors who ask questions like "What do you think Yeats meant when he has the narrator mention the fire in his head?"

Stories and poems are as real as coral reefs, and their meanings are not simply detachable. The person who can speak easily of the Resurrection as a "faith event," or some equivalently slimy term, and who locates its meaning within the Christian community's reading of that event (leaving the datum on which the belief was based in a limbo which apparently doesn't matter), looks to most believers and non-believers like someone embarrassed at being caught in a tradition which has at times been able to speak, without hedging, as if it really did believe what it says it believes. Of course the conservative who regrets the absence of a photographer at the tomb entrance is just as tone-deaf. Both seem to want God to conform, to fit into patterns their views demand. Their faith is in *their faith*, and as such it doesn't matter; it also misses so much of what the story, as a story, has to say.

The fact is that despite everything said to turn them in other directions, Western Christians *like* Christmas better than any other feast. If Christmas, over several centuries, came to be an important feast, it is worth wondering what such a slowly dawning thing has to tell us. The Irish writer Noel Dermot O'Donoghue has written of "the depths of which dogma is the surface." Dogma, and the stories which give it birth, attend it, and grow around it through time, point us in the direction of a reality so deep that no story (and certainly no dogmatic formulation) can exhaust it.

Until the fifth century there was no agreed-upon date for the celebration of Jesus's birth. It was not considered as important as the feast of Epiphany, which (because it was the sign of Jesus's revelation to the world) was commonly believed to be more central to Christian faith than the celebration of Jesus's physical birth. Origen opposed the celebration of Christmas, which he found too much like the pagan custom of celebrating the births of kings and pharaohs. There were other pagan associations as well. An argument once advanced for celebrating the feast during the spring makes Christmas sound like a fertility rite: since the world was created in a springlike, blooming state, Christmas, the birth of the world's true life, must be in the spring. Bede writes that before the arrival of Christianity in England, the 25th of December was celebrated as "mother's night," and it involved an all-night vigil. Pagan emblems like the evergreen were borrowed for the feast.

The pagan influences are interesting enough to suggest to some writers that the feast of Christmas grew from a need to woo pagans from their own feasts, leaving them with enough of the old ways to content them, while sliding in the Christian message on the sly—the sugar around the pill, so to speak. Without denying that there might be some truth in this, it should be pointed out that it is much too simple a notion. In fact, pagan elements were usually condemned at first, and were reluctantly accepted only when it became clear after several generations that, condemned or not, some of the old ways were going to stay.

The other overlooked fact is that Christmas grew in importance not so much to fight off paganism but to

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fight off another version of Christianity. Christmas was the feast of the Word made flesh, an emphasis which had been obscured by the adoptionism which saw Jesus's divinity as something conferred upon him at his baptism. The Christmas feast affirmed the holiness of the flesh, flesh "chosen before time began," as adoptionism never could. And while there is a point to Origen's worry that Christmas celebrations were suspiciously like the pagan celebrations of kingly birth, the celebration of Jesus's birth and the stories which surround it, with all their scenes of poverty and exile, turn the conventional notion of kingship upside down. (In this the feast is like the early Christian affirmation "Jesus is Lord," a deliberate counter to the Roman "Caesar is Lord.") This king "came not to be served but to serve," and his reign began in a stable.

The radicalism of the Incarnation might seem to have been domesticated by our way of making Christmas a simply jolly feast, but some of its harsh and unsentimental aspect has always showed through, for example in the traditional carol "What Child Is This?" It contains the words, "Good Christians, fear. For sinners here the silent Word is pleading . . . Nails, spears shall pierce him through. . . ." The joy of a child's birth and the tragedy of his later suffering were associated from the first.

No Christian feast can finally be separated from the others. The Word made flesh, born on Christmas, rose from the dead on Easter. If Christians have, over the centuries, made Christmas an important feast it might be because of the closeness of the event to ordinary experience. It is, to say the least, difficult to imagine rising from the dead. But nearly everyone has experienced the birth of a child in some way, and this commonness brings the feast close to home. At the same time, the assertion that there is something divine about this child, that the strange story of Incarnation begins in this universal human circumstance—this is what makes Christmas at once the most accessible and radical feast. No other feast expresses the paradox of Christianity better: the God who came in the vulnerable and needy form of a child is very much a part of the tradition which includes Abraham's dark obedience, the crucified Christ, and the God who makes himself bread to be eaten.

However, this notion of Incarnation can stop too easily at sentimentality. The Word did not become flesh just in order to move us or bring tears to our eyes annually. One ancient implication of the doctrine of Incarnation has been neglected in recent years; Christmas is a good time to reflect on what the Fathers of the church called *deification,* the belief that we are meant to share in divinity, and that anything less is less than Christianity. Paul called Jesus "the first born" of many brothers and sisters, and in the gospel of John Jesus asks the Father "that the love you had for me may be in them, and I may be in them." Jesus, according to the Fathers, is the image of what each of us is meant to be. The important distinction was not between Jesus's divinity and our humanity; rather, Jesus's divine humanity was his by nature, and ours was a gift.

This is, of course, a hard saying. It is so unsettling that many otherwise sensitive theologians find it hard to hear its implications at all. In his important book *On Being a Christian* Hans Küng asks of deification, "But does a reasonable man *today* want to become God? What were stirring patristic slogans at that time—like 'God became man so that man might become God'—are almost completely unintelligible today. The theme of an exchange between God and man (or between the two 'natures'), highly relevant for Hellenistic hearers, means nothing at all to an age so sensitive as ours to the absence of God and 'God's darkness.' Our problem today is not the deification but the *humanization of man.* Even in the New Testament what happened in and with Jesus of Nazareth is not interpreted everywhere as an incarnation of God or—more exactly—of God's son or God's Word. If this interpretation is to have any meaning at all for modern man it will only be in virtue of its implications for man's becoming man." (*On Being a Christian,* Doubleday, pp. 442-443)

Hans Küng has done so much valuable work (especially in combating certain unChristian notions of infallibility and ecclesiastical franchises on God's truth) that it seems picky to mention what is wrong with this passage; but has anyone ever seriously suggested that the Fathers believed deification to be intelligible? Or that intelligibility is the point? The reference to "modern man," "reasonable men today," "our problem today," and "an age so sensitive as ours" all perpetuate the notion of modern enlightenment vs. previous darkness. No one reasonable wants to become God, but this is due partly to the fact that as we are *now* we cannot really know what or who God is; we do not know what becoming God would mean. That is part of the point.

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Gregory Nazianzen said that those who attempted to pry into the mystery of God would go mad, and Basil said that anyone who claimed to know God was depraved. No serious theologian or mystic of any age has been unaware of the absence or darkness of God, though in our time of Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and universal boredom it is no longer the theoretical preserve of theologians, but an omnipresent reality.

It is true, as Hans Küng says, that this doctrine has a meaning if it can speak to us of what it means to become truly human. I would suggest, though, that it is not enough to use words like "humane" or "humanization" withot reference to deification. The reason that we cannot at present know what God is is that we are in the idol-making business: even God becomes an idol. We cherish the image of God, the notion of what it means to be Christian, a picture of the church; and all of them stand in the way of God, the life of Christ, and true Christianity. To ask for intelligibility is, I think, a mistake. God at work in us may seem to be absolute emptiness (as God was to Abraham, Job and Jesus in Gethsemane); but it is this emptiness at work in us which can uncover the divine humanity, and it is this which defines the truly human, rather than anything we can arrive at on our own.

Not quite to prove the point, but nearly, let me offer an example of human self-definition worked up by someone less profoundly informed than Hans Küng (who, working from a tradition which has accepted the belief in deification, correctly identifies many of our false gods). In *Self-Esteem* (Celestial Arts Press) Virginia Satir writes, "I am me. In all the world there is no one else exactly like me. Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because I alone choose it. I own everything about me—my body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice. . . . I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes. Because I own all of me I can become intimately acquainted with me. By so doing I can love me and be friendly with me in all my parts. . . . Whatever I think and feel at a given moment in time is authentically me. If later some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought and felt turn out to be unfitting, I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new. . . . I own me, and therefore I can engineer me. I am me, and I am OK."

This is a pathetic example of what happens when traditional wisdom is lost, and traded away for "going to where the people really are" (to use a current catchphrase in religious education). Where they really are is in some kind of shopping center, being victimized, more than anything else, by a society which sees everything as controllable, potentially understandable, with happiness and fulfillment a goal and a right, rather than an occasional, fortuitous thing—a world with no unpredictable or uncontrollable limits.

The radical belief expressed at Christmas is that the source of everything sent his own life into flesh because of love, and shares that life with us. A doctrine of Incarnation which does not go as far as the Fathers did in asserting our own divine humanity can become idolatrous: Jesus becomes another remote god, and not the God who emptied himself to share humanity. If modern man does not understand a statement like "God became man so that man might become God" this is only because no one understands it. It can be lived only by emptying ourselves of all our notions of God and man. The symbols which surround the story of Christmas are upsetting ones: a pregnant virgin gives birth to a child in a barn, and the child is the world's salvation. The story of the Incarnation, and the ancient belief in deification, might show us that it is not enough to aim at being human. It is better to begin with our unknowing, spending what might be a confusing and dark time in the presence of someone presently unknowable, in order to find out what we are called to be.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

ALONG KING'S HIGHWAY

Ranks of chicory,
troops of tiger-lily
stride at roadside
this Fourth of July.

Armies of yarrow,
diasy, rhododendron
parade to the wind's
fife and drum.

Gilt and brass glow
in long green rows:
goldenrod, goat's beard,
cinquefoil and primrose.

Butter-and-eggs, loosestrife,
black-eyed susan bands
salute the sun's
reviewing stand.

Catnip and hawkweed corps,
battalions of bouncing bet,
present stalks,
attention, eyes right:

Beat the buttercup,
whistle the vetch,
follow the bellflower,
forward march.

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THE ANGEL GABRIEL DISSENTS

PETER STEINFELS

Mind you, Gabriel had never pretended to fathom the whole Plan. It certainly seemed excessive, and what God saw in humanity was a mystery to Gabriel. Still, he was not one for complaining. Kept his peace, stood his turn before the throne, ran an errand or two every millennium. But this last touch, it really was too much. An ordinary Gallilean woman? Birth in a stable? With dumb animals for attendants, and poor shepherds—and let's admit it, Gabriel thought the two aren't all that different. Maybe God was losing his grip.

Gabriel decided to say something. "With all due respect, God," he began. "That is, I see in my latest orders. . . ." he said. "I mean, do you really think this is a good idea?"

God said nothing, but He looked thoughtful.

"I know how you feel," said Gabriel. "About the poor and the vulnerable. I don't say I understand it—what angel could? But all the same, aren't you overdoing it? Working folks . . . pushed around by decrees of the mighty . . . no roof over their heads. Pardon me, God"—Gabriel wanted to be gentle—"it's simply too obvious."

God still said nothing.

"I suppose you know humanity better than I do," Gabriel conceded. "But I'm not sure I like what they'll make of this. You and I know this isn't just another case of a prophet raging away. You can tolerate a little rhetoric in a prophet, a bit of drama, a wild vision or two. But God—*this is policy*. Things aren't ever going to be the same again. We ought to be careful."

God was silent.

"Listen to this, God. *'He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent away empty.'* Very poetic," said Gabriel drily. "The middle class will love it. Stirs their guilt, tickles their indignation. And, oh, what sauce for their own ambition! I'm not denying that royalty and wealth have to be taken down a peg now and then, God. But we know it's more complicated than that, don't we? You've been a king yourself."

God did not reply.

Gabriel was undeterred. "So half the time it'll be an excuse for envy and resentment and all kinds of mindless, worldly egalitarianism. And the other half? Hypocrisy, God, sheer hypocrisy. Why you're practically handing it to them on a silver platter. They'll scrub down the animals, and give the shepherds fresh shaves, fumigate the stable and transform it into a Renaissance palace when it isn't a snow-covered Swiss chalet. Whatever point you're trying to make—and I think I've expressed my doubts on that score—will be smothered in sentimentality. Everyone who gives a trinket to a child will congratulate himself on carrying out your word."

God remained silent.

"Examine the question theologically, God." Gabriel knew he was getting on thin ice, but why not give it a try? "What we're trying to convey is your presence with the downtrodden, your solidarity with the suffering, your challenge to the mighty. I grant that the paradox often escapes me, but no matter. Now should a message like that really come from the downtrodden and lowly? It seems like self-interest. It can hardly shock the consciousness. From a prince, however, wouldn't it be an unmistable rebuke to the culture of the time? A contradiction, you might say, to its symbolic structure." Gabriel was not at all sure where he had picked up these phrases, perhaps in some theological chatter with his companions.

"To assume the form of the mighty, to 'humble' this governing social symbol, to reveal in and through this power the radical 'transvaluation of values'—I know you've always enjoyed Nietzsche, God—now *that* would be the scandal you are seeking." No one could have been more surprised at the conviction with which he advanced this argument than Gabriel himself, but it also pleased him. He felt very clever.

God did not say anything. He no longer appeared to be paying attention.

"Why not think it over awhile?" Gabriel asked. "A few centuries." He was not making headway, and he knew it. "Things will be more hygienic."

The silence was overwhelming. Gabriel felt himself relenting, borne away in some tide of both wisdom and sorrow. Gabriel looked at God and felt sorry for him, and in this swelling of pity came a strong rush of duty. Gabriel bowed. God stirred.

"I'm on my way," said Gabriel.

"Good," said God. "You're an angel."

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PATRIOTIC GORE

THE SCREEN

There is a certain level on which we see contemporary Italy as a symptom of the disease that is going to kill us all. That's the level on which Pasolini's *Salo* and Bertolucci's *1900* have been made. With its kidnappings and pollution, its political chaos and *dolce vita*, Italy is a country that the rest of us are watching uneasily these days to get a preview of the decline and fall of the whole Western World. And these new historical epochs by two of Italy's greatest directors seem to fit into this pattern of warnings that the end is near. In a curious way Pasolini's film and subsequent murder also suggest that, artistically anyhow, the end for Bertolucci may be at hand already. At least it is tempting to see in this film that has ended Pasolini's life the course that Bertolucci's career will take as well. *Salo* is such a desperate, violent, degraded film that it makes a ghastly kind of sense for Pasolini to have been murdered by a homosexual lover after making it. And by the same token, the nature of *Salo* as a work of art seems to inflate the importance of similarities between it and *1900*. It seems to aggravate, and perhaps exaggerate, the significance of some horrific imagery that also occurs in Bertolucci's film.

Bertolucci's difficulty in *1900* is the same in which he always finds himself. He has a style that is in search of a subject matter. He has such extraordinary stylistic powers that no subject seems commensurate. They all evaporate and become nebulous under the pressure of his vision. The one exception to this was *Last Tango in Paris*, where the subject was sex. That subject proved large and substantial enough to be equal to Bertolucci's style. In *1900* he has tried to find a subject just as large, but without success. His subject here is modern Italy—all of it, its history, its culture, its politics and people. But with a film that runs over five hours in the original Italian version, and over four even in the version currently being shown in this country, Bertolucci has over-reached himself. He has again come up with a handful of air.

The story Bertolucci has written for his film deals with two men, one a peasant, Olmo (Gerard Depardieu), and the other his *padrone*, Alfredo (Robert De Niro), who are born on the same day in 1900. Both are brought up under the tutelage of their grandfathers (Sterling Hayden and Burt Lancaster) who prepare them for their roles in life—Alfredo to be a landowner and Olmo to be leader of the local Communists—and both marry women (Stephania Sandrelli and Dominique Sanda) who come to tragic ends.

As even this brief outline must suggest, Bertolucci's characters lead such symbolic and allegorical lives that they are hardly characters at all. By trying to personify in them the whole course of Italian history from 1900 to the present, Bertolucci oversimplifies badly both historical conditions and the human one. How insubstantial Bertolucci's characterization is can be seen from the fact that Robert De Niro gives in this film the most toneless, lost performance of his career. The ultimate method actor, a man who can wriggle his way into *any* personality, as his performance last year in *The Last Tycoon* proved, De Niro cannot get a hold on the character of Alfredo at all. There is nothing to get ahold of since, as I said before, Bertolucci has come up with a handful of air himself.

The real failure of the film's content, however, is a failure of nerve. It is Bertolucci's failure to have the courage of his own political convictions, or even to have any political convictions. After having reduced the struggle between landowners and peasants, Fascism and Communism, to an episodic brawl between two men who were raised as brothers, Bertolucci then calls the fight a draw. As old men in the last scene they are still trying ineffectually to cudgel and pummel each other as they have been at every turn of history since the film began. The reason Bertolucci has such good-natured tolerance for them both is that behind the dumb show of politics in *1900* lies a vague sentimentalism about Italy. In a scene early in the film where Alfredo and Olmo are playing follow-the-leader in a field, each boy digs a little hole in the ground to stick his penis in, and from this there follows in the film a kind of mystique about the earthiness of all Italians. It is as if Bertolucci thought men really could copulate with the land—as if he believed in some eternal, autochthonous myth of Italy, and saw Italian politics as a mere ritual part of that myth.

The worst that can be said about much of the imagery this sentimentalism produces would be that it is ribald, as when the village men massage the anuses of their livestock to get manure to throw at Attila (Donald Sutherland), the local Fascist leader. But elsewhere Bertolucci's affection for the brutishness of rural life becomes perverse and turns into an enjoyment of brutality. In one scene we see a peasant cut off his own ear. In another, Attila crushes a cat to death with his head. In yet another we have to watch while Attila kills a young boy by battering the boy's head against a wall.

It may be that Bertolucci has conceived the boy's murder this way so it will appear to us a variation on the theme of the killing of the cat earlier. Perhaps he expects us to understand from the two images of bloodied heads something important about the character of Attila. But understanding cannot enter in when the imagery that's supposed to convey it is so shocking. Such images only leave us numb. Whatever symbolic

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meaning may lie in them, that meaning is lost, and couldn't have justified the images themselves anyway. Scenes of this kind in a movie are an atrocity against our eyesight, and it is distressing to see Bertolucci employing them. If he can rely on such scenes at all, what is to prevent him in the end from making a movie like Pasolini's *Salo*, which has nothing but scenes of this sort in it?

(The first of two parts)

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

BOOKS

THIS SIDE OF DEATH

WINSTON WEATHERS

Lazarus

ANDRE MALRAUX

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $7.95

Seriousy ill in 1973 with a "form of sleeping sickness," André Malraux spent critical days in the Salpêtrière Hospital wrestling with the possibility of his own death—a confrontation with mortality some three years before his actual death in 1976. That wrestling led Malraux to the writing of this book, which explores not only the idea of death but also the "meaning of life" as pondered from the near-death perspective.

This final volume in Malraux's autobiography is an artful, economical summary of much of his previous writing, a useful introduction actually to his thinking about man's fate, the human condition, the fundamental man, etc. "My view of man," Malraux says, "has changed little over the past thirty years," and now that view is given its last, perhaps most effective, articulation Reliving the events of his illness —anxiety, plunges into unconsciousness, stretches of lucidity, dark nocturnal dreams, remembered images floating before him—Malraux sets forth his essential beliefs and convictions.

In the light of the death-resurrection experience, Malraux sees himself as a modern-day Lazarus. He has been to the dark wall of death and has returned. He has things to tell us—not unlike Prufrock/Lazarus, "Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all." Indeed, he makes the great effort to provide us knowledge about death—recalling the famous deaths of Socrates and Christ, probing the very ways of dying (why is suicide taboo? can we make a good death if we are destroyed by torture?), surveying our death customs (reminding us of the distribution of sugar skeletons to children in Mexico on All Souls' Day). He reviews his father's suicide. He discusses death philosophically with his doctor. He records the death-throes of the patient in the next room. He comments on his own lifelong concern with the "metaphysical character of death."

But in his meditations, ranging twixt battlefield and hospital (those two representative locations of twentieth-century suffering), where is the knowledge about the mystery of death itself? Knowledge about dying, yes. But what about the *condition* of death? The being *in* death? Malraux admits (as do other great Lazarus figures in modern literature, those of Andreyev, Rilke, O'Neill, Lagerkvist—and unlike the Kübler-Rosses) that his "odyssey outside the earth to bring back the tablets" brings back nothing at all. "The revelation is that nothing can be revealed. The unknown realm of the unthinkable has neither shape nor name." And he candidly explains: "The tragedy of agnosticism does not lie in the fact that we regard death as unthinkable, but in the fact that we cannot bring ourselves to do so. . . . The word *unknowable* insidiously suggests a knowledge that is never attained. . . . The unthinkable is not what is hidden from us. It does not imply that we are impotent; it implies *nothing*."

This unthinkable nothingness "terrifies humanity," but Malraux proposes that "it alone can deliver humanity." For the "inconceivable has no attributes—not even menace" and without menace there is no fear. Accepting the nothingness, we can die without anxiety. And pressed against the wall of nothingness, Malraux also realizes that the only vision left is that of life itself. We do not die with our eyes looking into death. We die with our eyes staring back into the lighted room of existence. "Am I, from the House of the Dead, destined to note down only what belongs to life?" Malraux asks. And the answer is yes—his *Lazarus*, a book of death, becomes an affirmative book for the living.

Affirmative in that Malraux gives major emphasis to the human quality of fraternity, that instinctive "element in man which is today fumbling for an identity," "as mysterious as love, and as divorced from right-mindedness or duty; like love—and unlike liberty—a provisional sentiment, a state of grace." Looking back from death's shadows, Malraux discovers the meaning of life implicit in this linking and constructive fraternity embedded in human nature. To demonstrate, Malraux devotes a large portion of the book to his own fictional account of an incident from World War I that, for him, provides the ultimate definition of fraternity: At Bolgako on the Vistula, 1916, the first German gas attack, which, Malraux says, was "a confrontation be-

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tween fraternity and death." Malraux vividly describes the attack upon Russian forces and the unexpected rescuing of Russian troops from the trenches by German infantrymen; in defiance of militarism, an irrepressible human compassion.

Malraux also suggests, affirmatively, that, in the face of death's nothingness, we not only can discover but can help shape life's meaning. At the moment of death, the life we review can become our ultimate consolation if that life is transmuted by our creative vision. Malraux's own autobiography is, I think, a demonstration of that proposition. Not only the life he led, but the book he wrote, reveal Malraux's transformation of random events into organized life, life into art: life transformed into biography, reality transformed into a certain fiction. He says, "I have developed the habit over the past few years of seizing and storing up the images of the past. Those that succeed each other here come pat—a biography as false as any other." False biography perhaps, but life thoughtfully orchestrated into wisdom, suffering recollected in charity.

And for the man who lost his faith, as he tells us, after Confirmation what else to do but discover and create value in *this* world, this side of death, in this natural and earthly city? Malraux's entire life—literary, political, and otherwise—seems devoted to that task.

The Fifties: The Way We Really Were

DOUGLAS T. MILLER & MARION NOWAK

Doubleday, $10.95

Home Free

DAN WAKEFIELD

Delacorte, $8.95

ROBERT EMMET LONG

Perhaps the moral of *The Fifties* and *Home Free* is that there never *was* any ideal time to be young in post-World War II America. To Miller and Nowak, in their book *The Fifties*, life in the Eisenhower years was a particular disaster. Having been young in the fifties, I am sometimes still haunted by visions of the fifties as a verdant Eden now lost; but for the most part my sense of the fifties is closer to that of Miller and Nowak, who see it as a time of anxiety, oppressiveness, and eclipsed hope. I find myself agreeing with them that it was a cruel time.

One of the strengths of their sociological study is its amplitude, its abundance. In nearly 450 pages, the fifties is examined in its different aspects, from McCarthyism to the civil rights movement to rock music, and the book is filled with details which not only evoke the period but also reveal its stresses. Anxiety over an apparently impending nuclear war was traumatic in the fifties, and Miller and Nowak have demonstrated how this trauma affected both public and private life. It fostered a heavy moralism and dubious religiosity in the Eisenhower administration (John Foster Dulles spoke of smiting the enemy "with the full force of Christianity"); nurtured narrow prejudices (teachers were blacklisted and library books proscribed if they were suspected of "unAmericanism"); converted the film industry into a propaganda machine, alerting the public to the danger of dissidents (who might even be their neighbors); and cowed liberals into ritualistic praise of America. The fifties became an age of fear and cant.

The Fifties also describes what the country looked like then, the changes that were reshaping the national life—the expansion of the automobile industry, and the construction of superhighways (a 40,000-mile Interstate Highway System was built at the cost of over forty billion dollars); the migration of the middle class from the cities to the suburbs; the construction of giant Levittowns, with their acres of identical houses and totally standardized lives; the large expansion of advertising and public relations companies; the emergence of television as a dominant and leveling force in American life; the widespread use of new tranquilizers, and the enlargement of the profession of psychiatry. During this era of physical change, and of Cold War fright, the country turned away from a close examination of its domesitc problems to seek private escape, or embraced a selfish materialism, practicising Norman Vincent Peale's "religion" of success. Congratulating itself on its "normalcy," the period today seems curiously aberrant and neurotic.

The documentation of Miller and Nowak is detailed, and to read their book is virtually to relive the fifties, with its phobic obsessions and its dread of life. It tends, however, to be more of an indictment of the fifties than an "in-depth" study, which it claims to be at the beginning. It is practically programmatic in finding nothing "right" about the fifties. Its assessments of the different phases of life during that time are like checklists, indicating how the fifties failed to live up to the current attitudes toward ethnicity, the environment, feminism, etc. It scores imaginative writing in the fifties for its sense of social conditions as being unalterable; suggests that the fifties liberals made no contribution; dismisses Jacques Maritain and the religious existentialists for having the "wrong" preoccupations. At such times the authors seem as superficial as the waist-high culture they attack. Their prose, too, is often tin-eared, and sometimes ungrammatical. Reading the book one moves through a sea of split infinitives, trite expressions (a television show "hit the mark"), and illogical metaphors ("religious aspects permeate many of his works"). The book is useful in putting to rest any lingering illusions one may have about the fifties, but in allowing for no complication, for nothing redeeming, it leaves an impression of conclusions reached in advance, of an emphatic involvement never undertaken.

To turn from the fifties, as they have been recreated by Miller and Nowak, to the late sixties and early seventies, the setting of Dan Wakefield's novel *Home Free*, is to turn from nightmare to nightmare. If Miller and Nowak have depicted an age in which there was a deep suspicion

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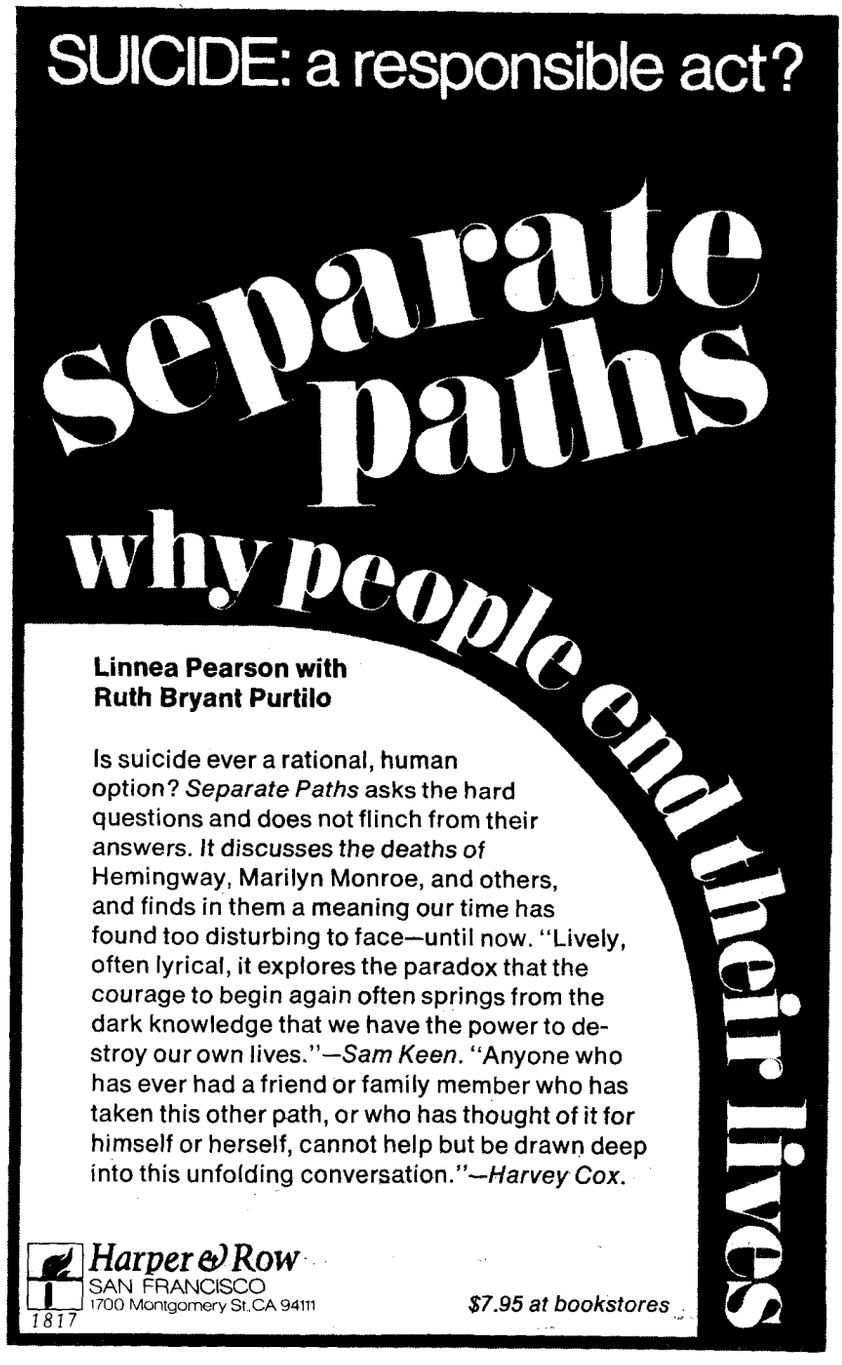
of the sensual and sexual, the odd or different, Wakefield has centered his work in the permissive culture which followed. By the late sixties, when *Home Free* begins, American impersonality has rapidly accelerated, and a search for identity through drugs and sex has created a new and acute form of loneliness.

The novel opens in the historic city of Boston that is now a scene of singles bars, frequented by young people who often exclaim "man," "far out," "dig" —and "heavy" when *Moby Dick* is mentioned, a book no one has ever read but which one of them has heard of. They are products of the middle class, but are drop-outs of its dream; rootless, they live in small, shabby, overpriced apartments that are compared to the compartments of a train. The Vietnam war is still in progress, and it is one of the symptoms of the betrayal by their society which the young people feel. Another is the meaningless world of jobs, which are scarce, and in any case are humanly unfulfilling. They attempt to find meaning, instead, in personal relationships, which are casually sexual, and almost always brief. Even if they last for a while, they involve a great deal of drinking, and taking of hash, coke, and pills, part of a search for a permanent sunrise, underscored by a refrain from the Beatles—"Here Comes the Sun."

The protagonist of the novel, Gene Barret, has dropped out of several colleges but is now finally finishing his degree. While he does, he works as a bartender at the Crossroads bar, and lives with his female history instructor, a few years older than he is, a "new" woman whose sexual relationship with him involves no commitments—either to fidelity or to any prospect of marriage and children. Disillusioned with their relationship, he indulges in an orgy of drunkenness, and afterward recuperates in Maine, where he meets two grotesques, called the Coaches, who have dropped out of the "system," and are now committed to nothing more than sharing a girl named Pal. In Maine, Gene becomes involved with a hard-drinking giantess named Stella the Divorcee, who attempts to replace the belief in love she has lost with purely physical sex. He then moves on, to the Midwest, where other isolates are encountered, has another transient relationship (another wounding), and the novel ends in Los Angeles, and its Venice suburb, a world of big rock promotions, artiness, group orgies, and spectacular, sickening fakery. Nauseated, Gene begins taking heroin to find "peace of mind," even though he realizes that, sooner or later, in one way or another, it will destroy him.

Wakefield has a very acute insight into the world he writes about—the broken promises of the sixties society which lead to a rejection of everything but the personal and momentary, and then the betrayal of the momentary (the title *Home Free* is doubly ironic, since Gene has lost his "old" home, and can find no home in being "free"). But his characters are monotonously two-dimensional, seem too much like parodic signs of their times, to engage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one's imagination fully. Gene himself rarely rises above a yearning mindlessness as he moves, with twitched reflexes, from one experience to another. The unrelentingly manic pace of the novel leaves one feeling almost as numb as Gene Barret when, at the end, he is told that nothing is "free," and prepares to inject a needle into his vein.

Solitudes

R. G. VLIET

Harcourt, Brace, $8.95

W. S. Di PIERO

When R. G. Vliet's first novel, *Rockspring*, was published four years ago it received limited but enthusiastic attention. The few reviewers who wrote about it—Malcolm Cowley was its most outspoken supporter—all called attention to Vliet's "poetic prose," though all backed away from defining that toothy phrase. *Rockspring* was an eccentric book. Though set in Texas and Mexico of the 1880's and peopled with outlaws, cowboys, and a vibrant heroine, the book certainly wasn't a Western in any conventional sense. While the writing embraced the physical realities of the period in almost numbing detail, it did not create an anachronistic, museum-piece world, as the novels of Frederick Manfred do. *Rockspring* was flawed in part by its melodramatic plotting, but the language was stunning, vital in its rendering of feeling and event. Vliet suddenly established himself as *the* poet of South Texas, a landscape of plentitude against which men's actions emerged with striking moral clarity.

Vliet's new novel, *Solitudes,* is even richer, more carefully textured, and more coherent than his first. Aside from its well-built narrative, it offers us again an eccentric and valuable poetic style. One of the conventional strengths of prose fiction is to be found in its leisureliness, the way it relaxes into fictive reality. We associate the novel with amplitude, sprawl, just as we (wrongfully and unfortunately) associate contemporary poetry with leanness and attenuation of experience. Even our best fiction is largely descriptive, a gloss on perceptions rather than an act of perceiving. What distinguishes Vliet's prose style and places him in poetic kinship with novelists like William Gass and John Hawkes is his ability to animate reality, to *enact* rather than merely portray physical reality, and to do so with such urgency that the words on the page seem about to dissolve and be transformed into the things they signify—a kind of cabala of the imagination. It is this, rather than any ordinary "prettiness" of language, that makes Vliet's style poetic. And I would be tempted to call his style mere magic were it not for the radical questions his story raises about human solitude and its relationship to the huge and abundant *out-thereness* of the physical world.

Few novelists can write as vitally about nature:

> The sycamore went up, flaked and spotted, into the mass and separation of its leaves—wet leaves that loosed their drops to feed the root. Its silence and selfhood were terrible. Light crowded down around it as though to confirm its solitude, welled down onto the ranked orchard trees, every single one.

Solitudes suggests what might have happened to that reluctant American hero, Huck Finn, after he had lit out for the territory. He has become a lonesome, red-haired drifter named Claiborne Sanderlin who, in a moment of pure unself-consciousness, shoots and kills an old Mexican rancher. Clabe doesn't know that he suffers from epilepsy, he knows only that he fears that sudden darkness inside himself. Clabe's life at that point becomes a journey into discovery, to understand why he killed and to seek out the young woman whose picture he finds on the body of the dead patrician. Yet he doesn't know *why* he feels such need to find her.

Clabe is a man of pure instinct, and during his remarkable journey under the enormous sky he comes to seem one more brute creature of the plains and riverbeds. The novel tracks his search for the woman Soledad, his discovery of her, and his final liberating confrontation with himself—his reasons not only for shooting the old man, but his very reasons for being. The severe suffering he endures in his journey is necessary if he is to arrive at that thing inside himself that will not let him rest. In his own language, he must suffer the wound for the sake of the blessing.

The narrative moves briskly, sometimes by ellipsis, and Clabe's point of view, which governs the book, is so seamless that we are finally one with him when he reaches the luminous conclusion about himself: that his violence against others is an act of self-hatred bred by unknowing. From dread and murder the novel moves convincingly toward compassion and mercy. It is a tale about grace hard won, and about how self-knowledge finally redeems a man from his own worst instincts.

Though I use words like "redeem" and "grace" I don't mean to suggest that *Solitudes* is a Christian parable. To the contrary, Vliet is a deeply pagan writer. His harsh, sun-bitten world turns not on the will of a benevolent godhead but on the will of one man to shape his own existence in a savage uncentered world. It's an existential novel in the most honorable sense:

> To hell with the Lord God Almighty, fetch Him down here, let him walk in the brush, let Him see what it's like. All this God stuff,

REVIEWERS

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all this Sweet Jesus stuff, all them *words*. You can sing your psalms across a dead horse, you can keep up your prayers until you got a mountain pile, and never get out of this hell. It don't fit the pieces back together: this whole damn world knocked apart like a busted bale.

The book's title is a true emblem. When Clabe finally encounters Soledad in the second half, it's a powerful dramatization of Rilke's definition of love, the peculiar coming together of two solitudes in a wilderness. Clabe's language, gently curbed by humor, is appropriate to the occasion:

There ain't a man don't come out of that aloneness, don't live in it. Christ, a body moves through this world, lays on his pallet, and stands hisself up, and he don't touch no more than a bull-thistle blowin' through air. Come out of nowhere and goin' through nowheres. Wouldn't happen if a body didn't *know* it. A man might's well not *live* if he's gonna *think* on it. It'll kill him dead.

For a long time Clabe refuses to reflect on his own actions. He fears the cursed language of self-consciousness because it's what separates us so utterly from the rest of nature, that sheeted mass which is our primeval home and burial ground. "That's the hell of it," he says. "That's the dark of it, the bruised black and blue of it: *this damn knowin'*." In the book's last moments, Clabe finally comes to reckon with the solitariness of all things; in a moment of pure illumination he arrives at a definition, an articulation, of his world. His vision is nearly impossible to reduce to paraphrase:

And Clabe saw all things, trees and bugs and critters and weeds, and his own kind, too, thicker than leaves, each alone, each in the one-time onlyness of his self; and he knew they were dead or going to die, and a terrible grief came upon him.

The world hurts indeed, but Clabe's recognition of the coming and going of all things—when the Greeks said "Know Thyself" they meant know your own mortality—turns this novel into an act of ecstasy, a leap upon and into a world that is always "too close, too solid, too real."

In the clarity and *decency* of its vision, as well as in its precise, kinetic language, *Solitudes* is a special book. Its eccentricities are its strengths. It will be a shame, and a loss, if it is allowed to pass unnoticed.

IN BRIEF

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY, *by Karl Rahner, Seabury*, $5.95.

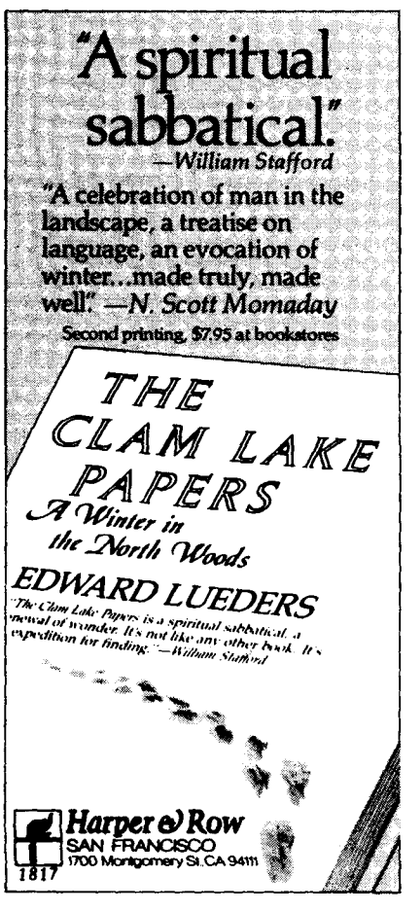
This 88-page theological summary of basic Christian life in a religious order is no fervorino or primer for novices but a tightly compressed reappraisal of religious life that is not one of his major achievements but shows flashes of genuine Rahner. One chapter, "The Religious Life and Tomorrow," deals largely with the life-style of orders in general, addressing themes such as "Calling and Vocation," "Prayer and the Religious," "The Challenge of Growing Old." The longest chapter, "Obedience and Freedom," is a carefully worked-out study of a subject of primary importance to most religious but Rahner's style here is painfully convoluted: is he or the translator responsible for diving into tangled abstractions and bringing up mud? His "Enthusiasm and the Religious" is warmly sympathetic to charismatic movements and surpasses most charismatic writings in depth and theological accuracy.

JOHN B. SHEERIN

Abigail McCarthy (con't)

forter of the afflicted, pray for us; help of Christians, pray for us—"? Why should they be without the rise and fall of the rosary as they gather round the dead—"pray for us now and at the hour of our death—"? Symbols need renewal, not obliteration.

When the farm workers first marched with Cesar Chavez they marched carrying the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe and singing her hymns. It is worth remembering that the virgin of Gaudalupe survived triumphantly a bloody revolution which drove an established church underground for a generation and defrocked all priests and nuns. Although she wore a robe sprinkled with stars, her foot was on the serpent —a fact which the Indians of Mexico had long ago interpreted as a victory over the serpent god of human sacrifice. Most Christian cultures were preceded by a mythic and ancient expectation of the immaculate mother to come. Some intuitive knowledge of truth is expressed in her person—perhaps the loving, merciful side of righteousness and the limitations of even the most successful revolution. There is one Mary, I believe—just as the gospel of liberation and the gospel of love must be one.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Gospels that is read in our churches on Sundays.

I do not think, however, that the trouble is with the translators' "poor grasp of English." They are highly competent scholars and they write excellent English elsewhere. No, their mistake was in trying too hard to make the text understandable by substituting familiar generic terms for the more technical terms in the text. Thus, as Noonan points out, they use "employee" instead of "steward." All stewards are indeed employees and the latter term is more familiar to the average reader. But not all employees are stewards. The very point of the parable depends on the fact that the man in question was not just an average employee, an assistant cook, a ploughman, a barnyard helper; he was *the* top employee. It was this special position that made it possible for him to grant favors to his master's debtors.

Perhaps the worst example of this sort of error is the translation of the Greek *telónès* as "tax collector" instead of "publican." This word does not mean just any tax collector. The publicans were a special breed. They paid a lump sum to the Romans for the privilege of collecting some special tax, for example, a toll, for a stated period of time. Having paid that lump sum, a publican could pocket every bit of money he collected. There was a great temptation to collect the maximum amount by hook or crook, even by cheating. No wonder publicans were despised. So "publican" had a pejorative meaning, as "loan shark" does with us. So the Confraternity mistranslation leads to absurdities. Thus the enemies of Jesus are said to criticize him because he was "a glutton and drunkard, a lover of tax collectors and those outside the law" (Mt. 11: 19). This is pretty foolish. After all, those people who work for the Internal Revenue Service are not traditional objects of our contempt.

The fact is that, in order to understand the New Testament, one has to do just a little special study. One has to find out what a "steward" did in those days and what a "publican" was. If an Italian novel is set in Venice and if the author says that one of his characters went from here to there in a gondola, a translator does not write that he went "by public transportation" even though gondolas are actually available for public transportation in Venice. To appreciate an Italian novel set in Venice one has to know at least a little about that city.

Isn't understanding the New Testament worth a little trouble too?

(REV.) PAUL HANLY FURFEY
Emeritus Professor of Sociology
The Catholic University of America

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Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors: In Mark Taylor's interesting "Novels Or War Novels" [Sept. 2] it was not mentioned that Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* was a bowdlerized version of his privately printed edition (1929, 520 copies) of *The Middle Parts of Fortune*. Happily, the original text has recently been published by St. Martin's Press.

MORRIS RABINOWITZ

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